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Substance use among college women with disordered eating attitudes and behaviors

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Disordered eating (e.g., binge eating, purging, fasting) is associated with high rates of psychiatric comorbidity and serious medical complications including death (Herzog et al., 2006). Past research has found substance-related disorders to be among the most common co-occurring problems for individuals with significant eating pathology (Fischer, Anderson, & Smith, 2004; Granner, Black, & Abood, 2002; Krahn, Kurth, Gomberg, & Drownowski, 2005; Piran & Robinson, 2006). The existing research in this area shows some inconsistencies in whether this increased risk for substance abuse is common to all types of disordered eating, or is specific to one particular pattern of disordered eating. The present study examines the relationship between substance use (SU) and disordered eating habits and weight concerns (DE); specifically whether different DE behaviors (binging, purging, restricting, and dieting) lead to use of different substances and different usage rates. The study also examines potential mechanisms for this relationship, including weight control, reduction of anxiety or tension, emotion enhancement, and psychological characteristics common to individuals with DE including body dissatisfaction, perfectionism, and maturity fears. Female undergraduate participants completed an online survey with items drawn from several measures of eating habits, weight concerns, substance use and expectancies for substance use. In analysis, it is expected that substance use (SU) will be more prevalent among women with disordered eating habits and weight concerns (DE) than among women without DE. Among women with DE, rates of stimulant use will be similar for those with and without bingeing and purging behaviors. Additionally, among women with DE, alcohol and non-stimulant drug use will be more prevalent among those with bingeing and purging behavior than those who show only dieting and food restriction.

This project was completed to fulfill a Capstone requirement.